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ABSTRACT

Individual differences in the motivation and skill to manage impressions can be measured by the Self-Monitoring Scale. "Blind" dating encounters were established to investigate whether complementarity rather than similarity in partner's self-monitoring would lead to greater attraction and satisfaction with the relationship. College students (N=64 couples) completed the Self-Monitoring Scale, the Bem Androgyny Scale, and personal data forms. Pairs of subjects met each other and conversed briefly. After the initial meeting, subjects completed Dion Scales to give impressions of their partners. Pairs then dated each other exclusively for three weeks (a minimum of three dates) and then completed a final Dion Scale. Results showed that high self-monitoring women were more favorable than low self-monitoring women about their dates, regardless of males' levels of self-monitoring. All males, however, preferred low self-monitoring women. These findings provide no evidence that complementarity of self-monitoring affects attraction in a dating situation. (NRB)

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WHEN OPPOSITES MAY ATTRACT: SELF-MONITORING AND DATING RELATIONSHIPS

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA, March 25-28, 1981.

One of the most pervasive aspects of human social interaction is "impression management." What people say and do is informative to others, and this information can be managed to create an image. According to Mark Snyder (1974) there are important individual differences in the motivation and skill to manage impression, and these individual differences can be measured by the Self-Monitoring Scale. Individuals scoring high on this scale - high self-monitors - are said to be very adept at tailoring their behavior and making it appropriate to whatever audience is at hand. On the other hand, individuals scoring low on the scales - low self-monitors - are said to be less motivated or less skilled at tailoring an image, or at least creating a different image for different situations.

In order to adjust their behaviors, high self-monitors collect and process more information about people with whom they expect to interact than do low self-monitors (Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, & Dermer, 1976; Elliott, 1979). Apparently, high self-monitors are seeking cues as to what image is most appropriate for the particular people involved. However, this information collection task may be considerably more difficult for the high self-monitor than we have implied so far.

Some of the problems confronting the high self-monitor are that other persons may not emit enough information, or

may not emit enough reliable information to be useful for creating an image. In the natural ecology, this might occur when two unacquainted high self-monitors meet. Both are actively concerned with creating an image, each is carefully scrutinizing the other in a search for cues, and each is trying to adjust her behavior to be "appropriate." It was our suspicion that individuals in this situation would be uncomfortable.

A more comfortable state of affairs might occur when the unacquainted pair consists of one high- and one low self-monitor. From the perspective of the high self-monitor, the partner would appear to be emiting spontaneous, uncensored reactions, and such cues are precisely what the high self-monitor seeks. From the perspective of the low self-monitor, the partner would appear to be remarkably compatible with himself. The "compatibility" is, of course, the result of the high self-monitor's image management. But what of unacquainted pairs of <u>low</u> self-monitors? We suspected that such pairs would also have uncomfortable interactions, at least initially, because neither partner would be motivated to adjust his behavior to that of the other partner.

In sum, we predicted that for unacquainted pairs of persons, complementarity in partner's self-monitoring would lead to greater attraction and satisfaction with the relationship than would similarity in self-monitoring. This hypothesis is daring, given the number of studies that have

failed to find greater attraction in complementary, as opposed to similar, relationships.

Method

We chose to test our hypothesis within the content of heterosexual dating encounters. College students are familiar with the notion of a blind date, and the situation is important enough for students that they will attempt to present a reasonably positive image to their partner.

The encounters were divided into 3 sessions. In the first session, volunteers met with the experimenter in large groups. At that time, the Self-Monitoring Scale, the Bem Androgyny Scale and some personal data were collected from each volunteer and the requirements of the study were explained. Participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 22, and not steadily involved with any regular dating partner. Participants were told they were expected to meet a blind date, and then date that person exclusively, for 3 weeks, for a minimum of 3 dates. People who felt that they may not be able to meet those requirements were encouraged not to continue with the study. This resulted in a sample size of 64 couples.

The second session involved the individual introductions. Each pair of participants were introduced; names, addresses, and phone numbers were exchanged, and then the couple was left alone for 5 minutes to become better acquainted. The 5 minutes of conversation was unobtrusively tape-recorded for

later analysis. At the end of the 5 minutes, participants were seated at separate tables, and given bipolar trait rating and confidence scales, (Dion Scales) with which to give us their initial impressions of their dates. Finally they were reminded of the conditions of the study and sent off to begin their 3 weeks of dating. When the 3 weeks had passed, participants returned in small groups, without their dates, to fill our a final Dion Scale and to discuss the study.

After the study was completed, couples were assigned to one of four cells, based on a median split of the self-monitoring scores for males and females: high male - high female, low male - high female, high male - low female, or low male - low female.

Results

Recall our prediction that attraction would be greater in complementary couples than in similar couples. Ratings for the pre-date session (summed Dion scales) did not confirm this prediction. Males' level of self-monitoring did not influence their partner's attraction to them, but females' level of self-monitoring did, F (1,32) = 5.00, p .04). When females rated their dates, the high self-monitoring women were more favorable about their dates than were the low self-monitoring women, regardless of males' level of self-monitoring. When the males rated their dates, however, all of the males preferred the low self-monitoring females!

We asked participants to express how confident they were that their ratings of their dates were correct, and we found the same pattern. High self-monitoring females were more confident that their ratings were correct. Males felt most confident about their ratings when they were rating low self-monitoring females and less so when their dates were high.

It could be argued that pre-date ratings were based on too little information for complementarity to be recognized. Unfortunately, post-date ratings were not consistent with predictions, either. In the post-dating period, the high self-monitoring females were less positive about their partners than they were in their pre-date ratings, but again, males' level of self-monitoring did not interact with females' level of self-monitoring.

Conclusions and Interpretations

Taken as a whole, data from the present study did not support our hypothesis that greater attraction would occur in couples with complementary levels of self-monitoring than in couples with similar levels of self-monitoring. Females' level of self-monitoring did influence her attraction to her partner, but the attraction did not persist, nor did it interact with the partner's level of self-monitoring.

There are several explanations for these results:

First, the sample size was small and there were very few participants per cell. Consequently, statistical power was low, and even if an effect had been present, it would have been difficult to detect.

Second, with the clarity of hindsight, we recognize that a dating context may not have been a good "test site" for our hypothesis. Dating relationships are situationally constrained by sex-role requirements and specific information about a given person may not be as useful for this particular interaction as we had originally assumed.

Third, the salience of the partner's "personality" in a first-blind-date situation may have been small, relative to the salience of other dating variables such as physical attractiveness.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in earlier research, Berscheid and her colleagues at Minnesota found that high self-monitors engaged in facilitative distortions, that is, they saw the dates selected for them as having more desireable qualities than other individuals. In our study we found this also, but only for females and only prior to dating. The effect did not persist to the post-date ratings. Apparently dating a "real" person imposed reality constraints upon the perceptions held by the high self-monitoring females, in effect, forcing them to depolarize their opinions of their dates.

In summary, contrary to predictions, this study provided no evidence that complementarity of self-monitoring affects attraction in a dating situation.

Addendum

The above presentation is a very brief summary of a very long thesis as it was given at the 1981 Southeastern Psychological Conference in Atlanta. Specific questions should be addressed to Michele M. Tomarelli, Department of Psychology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 30602.

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